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Safe winter driving tips from the NHTSA

By Robert Duffer, Chicago Tribune

With winter arriving in full force early in the season, the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) has released a thorough checklist of how to prepare for and navigate through winter driving conditions. With the third snowstorm of the season hitting the midwest, we narrow the list to some key pointers.

Preparing for winter conditions:

Carry items in your vehicle to handle common winter driving related tasks:

- Snow shovel, broom, and ice scraper.
- Abrasive material such as sand or kitty litter, in case your vehicle gets stuck in the snow.
- Jumper cables, flashlight, and warning devices such as flares and emergency markers.
- Blankets for protection from the cold.
- And a cell phone with charger, water, food, and any necessary medicine (for longer trips or when driving in lightly populated areas).

Check your battery:

- For gasoline or diesel engines, be aware that it takes more battery power to start your vehicle in cold weather than in warm weather.
- Make sure the battery cable connections are not loose.
- Have a mechanic check the battery power, charging system and belts.
- For electric or hybrid-electric vehicles, several things can be done to minimize the drain on the batteries. If the vehicle has a thermal heating pack for the batteries, make sure your vehicle is plugged in whenever it is not in use. If the vehicle has a pre-heat function to warm the car interior, set it to warm the passenger compartment before you unplug it in the morning.

Check/add coolant.

Check/add windshield washer fluid.

Check windshield wipers and consider buying heavy-duty winter wipers. Wipers are fairly straightforward to change and can take less than 10 minutes to swap out.

Check your floor mats. Make sure the driver-side mats haven't slid under the pedals. If there are hooks to anchor the mats, make sure the mats are in place.

Check your tires. You can find the correct pressure for your tires listed on the label inside the driver's doorframe or in the vehicle owner's manual. The correct pressure is NOT the number listed on the tire. Also, check to make sure the tread is sufficient with no uneven wear, and

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that the rubber is in good overall condition. Note that tire rubber starts to degrade after several years, and older tires may need to be replaced even if they have not seen much wear.

Check your spare tire.

Driving in winter conditions:

Before moving your car, clean snow, ice or dirt from the windows, the forward sensors, headlights, tail lights and backup camera.

Familiarize yourself with directions and maps before you go, even if you use a GPS system, and let others know your route and anticipated arrival time.

Drive slowly. It's harder to control or stop your vehicle on a slick or snow-covered surface. On the road, increase your following distance enough so that you'll have plenty of time to stop for vehicles ahead of you.

A word of caution about braking: Know what kind of brakes your vehicle has and how to use them properly. In general, if you have antilock brakes, apply firm, continuous pressure. If you don't have antilock brakes, pump the brakes gently.

If you find yourself in a skid, stay calm and ease your foot off the gas while carefully steering in the direction you want the front of your vehicle to go. This steering maneuver may require

additional counter-steering before you can regain full control of the vehicle. Continue to stay off the pedals (gas and brake) until you are able to regain control of your vehicle.

Stay focused; stow the phone.

In an emergency:

Stay with your car and don't overexert yourself.

Put bright markers on the antenna or windows and keep the interior dome light turned on.

To avoid asphyxiation from carbon monoxide poisoning, don't run your car for long periods of time with the windows up or in an enclosed space. If you must run your vehicle, clear the exhaust pipe of any snow and run it only sporadically — just long enough to stay warm.

We're with Windows, and we're here to help: The anatomy of a scam

by [Frank Catalano](#)

On its face, it was totally unbelievable. After all, when was the last time you recall any tech support pro-actively contacting you to solve a problem?

Advanced Windows "support" technology.

"Hello, sir. I am calling from Windows support."

So began the call at 3:36pm PDT on June 12. It was as if an automated phone tree at a software company had decided to atone for its sins and reach out. And I do mean automated. The patter, though delivered by apparently real humans with apparently authentic Indian accents, was remarkably rote.

"I'm calling on behalf of Microsoft's Certified Technician Team," said 8:53am July 3. So did 11:46am the same day. But 8:58pm May 15 called from "the technical services department of Windows." And the first one, six weeks earlier at 6:02pm May 14, declared, "I am with the Windows Service Center, and I am calling about your computer."

And boy, were they calling from exotic locations: "V5152358030054," "6752 6752" and just

simply “6752,” or so blurted my confused Caller ID screen. I thought I knew all the new area codes.

Then began the support. “You are getting errors on your computer and I’m calling to help.” What errors?, I’d often ask. “I won’t know until you go to our website and download our diagnostic tool.” Download. Unknown. Software. Sure.

While the patter would vary from male to female to male caller, the pitch never did. You’re reading from a script, I’d challenge. “No sir, I am not reading from a script,” 3:36pm June 12 protested. And then went right back to the script. But, like testing the limits of Siri (or, more appropriately here, Furby), it became mildly interesting to see what kind of answers I could elicit:

- How did you know I was getting errors? “We have a database of phone numbers of people who purchase computers.” (Those used to be called “phone books.”)
- How do you know I’m not using a Mac or an Atari 1040ST? “We can check. Please click on your Start button.”
- I can’t have a virus; I use the free and excellent Microsoft Security Essentials. “Well sir, that is better than using nothing.”

Expecting answers that were better than nothing, I turned to the real Microsoft.

“In 2010, Microsoft [began receiving](#) reports of scammers making phone calls or sending emails to people,” replied a spokesperson for Microsoft’s Digital Crimes Unit. The goal was often to trick people into buying support services, downloading fake security software or allowing remote access to their PC for likely un-nice purposes. Microsoft has referred the cases to the Federal Trade Commission, which had its own investigation underway and presumably still does.

The real Microsoft.

And yes, it’s no coincidence I’m getting a lot of these calls. A [lot of people](#) are. Almost paradoxically, the spokesperson noted, as more consumers learn from Microsoft and other tech firms that they should make their computers more secure, “we have seen an increase in cybercrimes that use deception and social engineering to exploit people.”

That doesn’t stop some would-be victims from attempting to reverse-engineer the favor. Eric Dawes, a former broadcasting colleague in the Seattle area wrote on Facebook he’s been getting similar calls. He decided to play along, clicking as directed until he informed the scripted caller that he only had a choice of running “Control Panel” or “PHK-U.EXE.”

Others have been [less kind](#), and a few have tripped into their own trap – such as the anti-malware [security researcher](#) who, in trying to documents the details, had his computer’s files deleted by a vengeful scammer.

The sobering part is enough people must be scammed successfully, otherwise the trickle of calls wouldn’t have increased to a seeming flood over the past several years. This includes, recently, calls to the Puget Sound area (unless the scriptoids have only now realized Microsoft is actually based nearby). Average loss? A Microsoft study pegged it at \$875, and that was two years ago.

The next time the phone rings, I’ll recall the advice from my father who, in a moment of cynicism about business, observed that, “When someone approaches you, remember they always want something.” And in this case, I don’t think it’s my faux virus. Unless it’s infected my wallet.

Frank Catalano (@FrankCatalano) is a [strategist](#), author and veteran analyst of digital education and consumer technologies whose GeekWire columns take a practical nerd’s approach to tech. See [the archive](#) of his regular GeekWire columns. He’s writing his own script, not for Hollywood, but in advance of the next inevitable call.

Senior Driving is Florida's Focus This Week

By: [Kevin Derby](#)

With more than 3.2 million residents older than 65 driving across the Sunshine State, Florida kicked off Older Driver Safety Awareness Week on Monday. Florida leads the nation with more than 17 percent of motorists in the state being senior drivers.

Looking to cut down on traffic fatalities, the third leading cause of injury-related deaths for seniors, the Safe Mobility for Life Coalition was launched in 2009 to focus on senior traffic safety. The coalition includes 27 organizations and agencies on the national, state and local levels including the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (FDHSMV) and the Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy.

Besides holding events, the coalition looks to make Florida safer and even has a "find a ride" program for seniors through its website. Last week, Gov. Rick Scott signed a proclamation declaring this week to be Older Driver Safety Awareness Week. This week, the coalition is looking to promote senior driver safety with activities across the state. The FDOT and the coalition are teaming up with the city of Tamarac to hold an event on Thursday focusing on senior driving.

"With the increasing number of Florida's population over the age of 65, it is important to provide resources to meet both their safety and mobility needs," said FDOT District Secretary Jim Wolfe on Monday. "With knowledge of their local resources we can help older adults learn how to be proactive about their safe driving skills and how to learn to maintain safe mobility after they transition from driving."

In the meantime, the FLHSMV issued safety tips on Monday for older drivers.

"More than 3 million of our almost 16 million drivers in Florida are age 65 or older," said Executive Director Julie Jones on Monday. "Being able to remain active and productive members of their communities is important to our older residents, and by highlighting the importance of driver safety, we hope they can continue to safely enjoy this freedom."

Reach Kevin Derby at kderby@sunshinestatenews.com.

North Adams Ambulance Offers Seniors 'File of Life' Cards

By Tammy Daniels

iBerkshires Staff

NORTH ADAMS, Mass. — North Adams Ambulance Service is reaching out to the area's youngest and not-so-young residents to help keep them safe.

The service was awarded two grants this year, one for child car-seat safety and another to provide a way for those with critical health-care needs to inform first responders.

The service received \$1,000 matching grant from the James and Robert Hardman Fund, through the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, to purchase "File of Life" information cards.

This grant, and the Board of Directors commitment to purchase an additional 2,000 cards, resulted in nearly 4,000 card available free throughout the service's coverage area of North Adams, Clarksburg, Florida and Stamford and Readsboro, Vt.

"This sustains the program that Triad already had," said General Manager John Meaney Jr. this week.

The senior safety group, North Adams Triad Chairwoman Pearl Mullett, had initiated the program but needed support to keep it going; the grant will also significantly expand it beyond the city.

The program's objective is straightforward: To have critical health information immediately

available to responders in emergency situations.

"The File of Life card enables EMS to quickly determine any life threatening conditions that a patient unable to speak or a frightened family member may not provide," said Lt. Amanda Tobin, in a statement. "These cards can truly be the difference between life and death."

The grant was awarded earlier this year and the cards, or information slips, have recently arrived.

Filled out cards should contain emergency medical contacts, insurance policy, Social Security number, health problems, medications, dosages, allergies, recent surgery, religion and a health-care proxy.

The slips come in two forms, one that can be folded up and placed in a wallet or purse and another than can be folded into a red File of Life pocket with a magnetic back so it can placed prominently on a refrigerator.

Amalio Jusino, assistant chief, who wrote both the grants, said too often people fail to fill out the entire card or update their medications, information that can be critical in a life-threatening situation.

"We come in and all they've filled out is their name and address," he said. That's prompted the service, working with Triad and other organizations including the Housing Authority and Visiting Nurse Association, to reach out to help seniors and others fill out the cards.

Ambulance personnel and partner agencies will be available to assist in completing the cards on Saturday, Dec. 7, from 10 to 2 at the Spitzer Center. Those unable to attend can get a File of Life card by calling the ambulance at 413-664-6680, Ext. 3; Jusino said help can be provided in filling out the cards at home.

The service also received a state Executive Office of Public Safety car safety seat for \$4,784 for 2013. The grant supplements the existing program from 2009, which included a trailer for car safety checks.

The money allowed the service to purchase 72 seats. "This should carry us for the next several years," said Meaney.

The free car-safety seat checks are done on the first and third Fridays of each month from 8 to noon through May 2014.

The checks are to ensure car seats are compliance; those that are not will be replaced through the grant. Only one car seat per child.

The ambulance service is also in the midst of the annual membership drive. However, an error led to the bank closing the its post office box, resulting in memberships being returned a non-deliverable.

Meaney said the service is in the process of rectifying the issue but, in the meantime, memberships can be sent to PO Box 1045, North Adams, MA 01247.

The drive is an important part of the ambulance service's fundraising. It is planning to replace one of its ambulances next year at a cost of about \$130,000.

Selling a Car? Watch For A New Telemarketing Scam

Cristina Miranda Consumer Education Specialist, FTC

The scenario: You want to sell your car without any hassles for a fair price. So you place an ad on a community website hoping for a quick sale. Shortly

thereafter, you get a call from what sounds like an auto company. For a fee, the company promises to put you in touch with a buyer. If your car isn't sold, they promise to refund your money. So you go ahead and pay the fee, and wait for the company to present a buyer for your

car.

The catch? According to a recent [case settled by the FTC](#), the auto company's claims are false. There are no buyers, and there is no refund. It's just another scam designed to bilk consumers.

Steer clear of telemarketing scams related to selling a car by following these tips:

- Resist making an immediate decision when someone cold calls you in response to an ad you placed. Scam telemarketers are likely to use high-pressure tactics to get you to give them money.
- Research a company before paying a fee for their service. Go online and use a search engine to find out what the company track record is. Look for any complaints that might signal a red flag.
- Get the specifics of the service you're paying for in writing. Ask for a copy of the company policy and terms of the service on paper, and make sure you read and understand the fine print before agreeing to it or signing anything.
- Register your home and mobile phone numbers with the [National Do Not Call Registry](#). Although it won't stop all unsolicited telemarketing calls, it will stop most. If your number is on the registry and you still get calls, they're likely to be from scammers ignoring the law.
- Report fraud. If you suspect a company is scamming you after having promised a service and not delivering, [file a complaint with the FTC](#).

For more information, check out [Buying and Owning a Car](#) and [Telemarketing Scams](#).

NHTSA May Add 'Silver' Rating for Older Motorists

This is being considered as the agency has released a five-year traffic safety strategic plan focused on older drivers.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration released a five-year strategic plan aiming to increase the safety of older motorists, saying the plan was posted in support of Older Driver Safety Awareness Week (Dec. 2-6). The numbers NHTSA provided explain why a plan is needed: Since 2003, the population of Americans 65 and older has risen by 20 percent and the number of licensed drivers in that age group rose by 21 percent, to 35 million licensed older drivers in 2012. During 2012, 5,560 people over the age of 65 died and 214,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes. "Those figures represent a 3 percent increase in the number of fatalities and a 16 percent increase in the number of injuries from the previous year. The data also show that older adults are at greater risk of dying or sustaining serious injuries, even in low-severity crashes," the agency reported.

NHTSA also has published a new guideline titled Older Driver Safety to help states develop plans to address the particular needs of older drivers and address emerging challenges from their growing populations of older drivers.

"Safety is our highest priority, and that includes ensuring the safety of our older drivers, who represent a growing population on our roads," U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said. "This plan will help enhance safety for everyone by helping states address the mobility needs of their older drivers."

The plan's elements include these:

- Vehicle safety: NHTSA is researching advanced vehicle technologies, including vehicle-to-vehicle communications, collision avoidance, and crashworthiness, to reduce the risk of death or injury to older occupants in the event of a crash. The agency is considering upgrades to its New Car Assessment Program, including a new "Silver" rating system for older occupants.
- Improved data collection: NHTSA is refining its data collection systems and will continue to evaluate crash rates, real-world injuries, as well as physical, cognitive, and perceptual changes associated with driver behaviors. The agency plans to conduct clinical and naturalistic driving studies to better understand the effects of age-related medical conditions, including dementia.
- Driver behavior: Indicating that it recognizes age alone is not a determining factor for safe driving, NHTSA said it will continue to focus its efforts on public education and

identifying functional changes, including vision, strength, flexibility, and cognition, to help at-risk drivers. The guideline issued Dec. 5 is part of this effort.

"Although older drivers are some of the safest drivers on our roads, our plan builds upon the NHTSA's current work to help older people drive as safely and as long as possible," NHTSA Administrator David Strickland said.

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Grant Will Help Program Continue Training for Safe Senior Driving

For the seventh consecutive year, the Training, Research and Education for Driving Safety (TREDS) program at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine has been awarded a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) that will help keep our roadways and senior drivers safe through professional training.

TREDS works with health care providers and law enforcement to identify and assist older drivers with health issues that may put them and other drivers at risk. Driving abilities decrease with age due to physical impairments such as vision, cognition, frailty and the use of medications. Prescription and over-the-counter medications can significantly impair necessary driving skills, including eye sight, reaction time, judgment, hearing, simultaneous task processing and motor skills. Additionally, when drugs are mixed with alcohol, the results can be devastating. According to studies, a 10 mg of Valium has been found to be equivalent to a blood alcohol content (BAC) of 0.10 in its ability to impair driving.

"Physicians have a responsibility to their patients and to the public to help minimize driving risks through appropriate prescribing practices and patient counseling," said Linda Hill, MD, MPH, professor of Family and Preventive Medicine, UC San Diego School of Medicine and TREDS program director. "It is estimated that 78 percent of drivers 55-years-old and older are using at least one prescription medication with the potential to impair driving, yet only 28 percent of senior drivers are aware that their medications have this potential effect. Patients over 65-years-old make up 12 percent of the population, yet they consume 31 percent of prescribed drugs."

Antidepressants are an example where both the medication and the disease being treated can affect driving safety. Depression increases the crash risk two to three times, and equally worrisome is that antidepressant medications have been associated with more than double the crash risk in the elderly. Muscle relaxers, anti-anxiety and anti-insomnia medications also adversely affect the safety of senior drivers.

Diabetes drugs, chemotherapy and narcotics can also result in impaired judgment, confusion, drowsiness, nausea and dehydration, all likely to impair driving safety.

"The frailness associated with cancer and chemotherapy alone reduces driving skills and increases crash risks," said Hill. "Individuals should understand the medications they are taking and how they can impair their driving abilities."

Tips for senior drivers taking medications from safety-council.org include:

- Ask doctor/pharmacist about the effects of prescribed medications on driving.
- Make sure the combination of your medications does not impair your driving skills. If you have more than one doctor, make sure all of them know everything you are taking.
- Never mix medications, share them or take them with alcohol.
- If the label says "do not use while operating heavy machinery" let someone else drive. With some medications, you may not be able to drive at all. If in doubt, choose not to drive.

TREDS training for health care professionals and law enforcement increases awareness of impairments common with aging that can impact driving ability. More than 2,000 health professionals and 1,800 law enforcement officers in Southern California have received TREDS training and materials to keep drivers safe on the road. TREDS is a collaborative partner of UC San Diego's Injury Epidemiology, Prevention and Research Center, working on comprehensive

injury prevention strategies.

Additional Background

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that by the year 2020, there will be more than 40 million licensed drivers over 65-years-old, and six million drivers over 65-years-old in California by 2030. As this "baby boom" generation reaches retirement, more focus is given to things that can be done to prolong safe driving. Hill's team recommends families begin talking about driving before a problem is suspected, and physicians should be included in these discussions. Medications should be reviewed routinely to identify any that could affect driving and to insure that they are at the lowest effective dose.

Funding for this program is provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The grant team, led by Hill, includes Kathy Fischer, MD, MPH, Jill Rybar, MPH, deputy director and Jana Jahns, MEd, training coordinator. For more information on the program, please visit treds.ucsd.edu

The Injury Epidemiology, Prevention and Research Center

The UC San Diego Injury Epidemiology, Prevention and Research Center is a combined effort of the Division of Trauma, Surgical Critical Care and Burns with its Level-1 Trauma Center and the Regional Burn Center and the UC San Diego Department of Family and Preventive Medicine to make our communities safer and to decrease the burden of injuries to our society.

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Traffic Safety Plan for Older People

Please be advised NHTSA has published a 5-Year Traffic Safety Plan for Older People as well as the Highway Safety Program Guidelines (#13 is specific to older people) as part of our Safety in Numbers campaign. [Click here](#).